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SUBJECT: SCIRI LEADER HAKIM OFFERS CHARGE ASSURANCES OF FLEXIBILITY ON SUNNI INCLUSION, CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires David M. Satterfield for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (C) SUMMARY: The leader of the strongest Shia Islamist party, SCIRI's Abd al-Aziz al-Hakim, promised rapid progress on Sunni inclusion and offered a moderate vision on an array of constitutional issues in a July 3 meeting with the Charge. Hakim and Constitution Committee Chairman Humam al-Hamudi, also a SCIRI leader, said they have deep suspicions about the intentions of some of the Sunni nominees. Nonetheless, they promised the Charge that they would work to see them included by July 4. Hakim said he supported federalism and thought the danger of Kurdish secession to be overblown. He laughed at the tortured debate over Iraq's "Arab" identity, considering the matter trivial. He said he supported keeping Iraq's provincial boundaries intact through the constitution but allowing room for the formation of regional entities that he expected to trisect the nine provinces in the Shia south. He confirmed a flexible view on the issue of religion and state and made clear multiple times that he wanted the constitution to be produced successfully, flexibly, and with active U.S. support. Hakim warned that a campaign to kill Shia leaders was underway and mused over the idea of establishing public security committees. Charge shot down that idea flatly, emphasizing U.S. opposition to any militia activity. Asked for his impressions of Iran's new president, Hakim said he thought Mahmud Ahmadinejad would prove a strong opponent of terror and an unlikely ally of U.S. efforts in Iraq. END SUMMARY

2. (C) SCIRI leader Abd al-Aziz al-Hakim urged a wider U.S. role in Iraqi affairs in a July 3 meeting with the Charge, pointing to the emerging constitutional debate and stating, "You have a key role -- more important than your role in the government formation process or before that." SCIRI, he said, is ready to implement and promote new ideas because Iraq needs a wider strategy to fight terror. "If you like it, do it," Hakim said. "We are not a research center." He elaborated on the following key issues:

-- SUNNI CONSTITUTION INCLUSION MOVING FORWARD: Hakim deferred to Constitution Committee Chairman Humam al-Hamudi on the issue. Hamudi said that the TNA would welcome Sunni Arab nominees into the constitution-drafting process by Monday, July 4. Hamudi emphasized that he still "had reservations" about both the names and the Sunni Arab request that the TAL not be considered binding in the negotiations. The Kurds remain concerned about Kirkuk's Mujbil Shaykh Issa, and De-Ba'athification issues may still apply to Haseeb Arif al-Obeidi. Hamudi has clearly lost confidence in his own deputy constitution committee chairman, Adnan al-Janabi, whom he blamed for the nomination of both these men and what he saw as an unnecessarily small number of Iraqi Islamic Party nominees to the committee. He also made it clear that he sees trouble ahead from these delegates. "We will bring them into the process for Bush," he said, "but if they block this it's your responsibility." (COMMENT: Constitution Committee members Jalal al-Din al-Sagheer, Sami al-Askari, Hamid Majid Musa, and Mariam al-Rais all echoed this warning in subsequent conversations with Poloff on the margins of the July 3 TNA session but said that induction would take place July 4. END COMMENT)

-- IRAQ'S IDENTITY: Hamudi said that he expected the constitution drafting committee to reach a compromise on the issue of Iraq's Arab identity similar to that in the TAL. The document would read, "The Arabs of Iraq part of the Arab ummah." Hakim laughed and made it clear he found the whole debate ridiculous. "Do you really need to say it?" he asked. "It's like saying all humans are sons of Adam." Questioning the importance of the issue, he said, "We do not want to be debating whether Iraq is an Arab nation while people are being killed in the streets." Constitution Committee member and independent Islamist Abd al-Hadi Muhammad Said al-Hakim, who also attended the meeting, mentioned that another compromise formula under consideration would have the constitution declare, "Iraq is part of two worlds, the Islamic world and the Arab world."

-- AN EARLY CONSTITUTIONAL DEBATE WITH SUNNIS: Hamudi noted that he had met with National Dialogue Council leader Salah Mutlak under the auspices of a meeting with UN SRSG Ashraf Qazi on July 1. Hamudi said they clashed over the issue of federalism. Mutlak was opposed to the idea, Hamudi said, and wanted the committee to draft a temporary document, akin to

another TAL, rather than a full-fledged constitution. Hamudi said that he and Mutlak were both in agreement that Iraq needed a parliamentary system of government. Mutlak, Hamudi said with suspicion, appears to want to join the constitution drafting process under any circumstances.

-- RELIGION AND STATE: Hamudi, consistent with past statements on the subject, said that the constitution will handle the issue of religion and state much like the TAL did.

-- DIVIDING RESOURCES UNDER FEDERALISM: Hakim said he saw no problem with any of several approaches to dividing state resources, all as long as the process were done in a way that is "balanced." Regions could own their resources, the central government could own them, or a percentage could be worked out to divide them. Hakim wondered whether opening the ownership of resources up to the provinces might create more disputes than it resolves, particularly as multiple provinces move to claim assets that overlap their borders. We asked how the system could be balanced if not all parts of the country have the same resource base or even regional governments yet. Hakim took the point and did not argue. (COMMENT: we sense the issue of natural resource revenues is one that requires considerable additional thought and discussion among Iraqis. END COMMENT)

-- LEAVING INTERNAL BORDERS OPEN TO DEVELOPMENT: Echoing Hamudi's view on the subject, Hakim said he believed that Iraq's new internal borders should not be drawn by the constitution. Instead, Iraq should continue to be governed according to its provincial system, allowing the three Kurdish provinces in the north to continue their arrangement. The remaining 15 provinces would be free to form regional entities with the agreement of parliament and their populations. Asked for his vision of such entities, Hakim said he expected southern provinces to form three regional entities of three provinces each. For instance, one entity might include Najaf, Karbala, and Babil. Another could include Basra, Muthanna and Dhi Qar. A third might join Wasit, Maysan, and Qadisiyya.

-- HOLDING FUTURE ELECTIONS BY PROVINCIAL LINES: Hakim said he hoped future elections would divide the 275 seats of the National Assembly among the provinces to ensure proper regional representation. Using the population statistics from the food-ration card system could provide at the proportion of seats for each region.

-- ON KURDISH SECESSION: Hakim said he was not worried about the possibility of Kurdish secession from Iraq. Speaking as if the Kurds were in front of him, he said, "If you want to secede, secede. We the Shia have nothing to lose. Starting a country unaccepted by the Islamic world would be a problem, however." (Note: PUK leader and Deputy Constitution Committee Chairman Fu'ad Ma'asum has also made of point of clearly dismissing the possibility of Kurdish secession in conversations with Poloff about the constitution process. "How could we withdraw?" he has said. "If we had a port it would be another story, but we are a landlocked nation." End Note)

-- LOOKING FOR MORE PROVINCIAL DEVELOPMENT: Hakim complained, with the support of his colleagues, that the U.S. has not taken sufficient action to provide provincial councils with resources. Hamudi specifically recommended moving forward with development in stable provinces as a way of showing restive areas the price of terrorism. Abd al-Hadi al-Hakim noted that, contrary to such an approach, electricity is currently better in strife-ridden Ramadi than it is in the comparatively calm province of Najaf. Charge and PolCouns described the major steps being taken in the PRDC process to address these concerns.

-- RAISING THE IDEA OF PROVINCIAL PROTECTION COMMITTEES: Hakim complained that a major effort was underway to target senior figures in the Shia community. The two most recent examples of this campaign were the assassination last week of TNA member Shaykh Dhari al-Fayad, a SCIRI ally and important tribal leader, as well as the killing of Sistani Representative Kamal al-Din al-Guraifi. Hakim said books were being distributed in the country defaming the Shia religion, declaring both its practitioners and those who do not denounce the Shia as "infidels." Hakim said he supported the formation of public security committees and he claimed was modeling the idea on British public defense programs. Charge responded flatly that the U.S. rejected any militia formation and activity in the country. Hakim protested that these would not be militias but he did not pursue the point.

-- IRAN'S NEW PRESIDENT: Hakim described the newly elected Iranian president Mahmud Ahmadinejad to be a "good, well-known man." Hakim noted in passing he had quickly dispatched an envoy to Teheran and subsequently spoke on the telephone with Ahmadinejad on July 2. Hakim said he was not personally acquainted with Ahmedinejad because the man had

risen to prominence following his own departure from Iran in 2003. Hakim said Ahmedinejad's election took place in circumstances similar to Khatami's: both men were elected because the public rebelled against the candidate perceived to be the "government's choice." In Khatami's case the citizens rebelled against Shaykh Natiq Nuri, and in Ahmadinejad the rebellion was against Rafsanjani. Hakim said he was pleased with what he had heard from Ahmadinejad's point of view so far, noting that the man "does not have a complex about the people of Iraq." He has made clear, Hakim said, that he opposes terrorism in Iraq. Hamudi jumped in to state that Ahmadinejad would not cause problems for the U.S. in Iraq. Hakim said all sides would do well to focus on the shared American-Iranian interests in Iraq rather than allow disputes in the American-Iranian bilateral relationship to put the two sides in conflict here.

13. (C) COMMENT: Al-Hakim was relaxed and cordial but interestingly Hamudi spoke almost as much as he. Hakim's desire to see the U.S. and Iran find a modus vivendi was evident; he and Hamudi recognize the hazards to them and their freedom of maneuver should American-Iranian conflicts be played out in Iraq. END COMMENT

14. (U) REO HILLA, REO BASRA, REO MOSUL, and REO KIRKUK, minimize considered.  
Satterfield